

Report

Without the research made possible by the AIPS Embassy grant I would not be able to complete a book manuscript during my sabbatical. The research fellowship allowed me the time and access to gather relevant information for my book. I flew into Lahore but after two days went to Islamabad and spent the next nine weeks there. I spent the first five weeks going through de-classified Pakistan government's cabinet proceedings at the National Documentation Wing (NDW) of the Cabinet Division. The first couple of weeks were frustrating because I had to learn how to work the microfilm machines and the person who could help me was on leave. Also because of Ramadan the NDW tended to close earlier. The director of NDW was very helpful in helping me navigate the formalities required before I could get access to the files. As far as getting important information for my book this part of my research far exceeded my expectations. I was able to find key documents from 1947 to 1986 which will enable me to document, in specific terms, the government's attitude towards the clergy and its attempt to create various institutions such as the Islamic Ideology Council.

I spent another two weeks at the National Parliament's library in order to go through parliamentary debates around Hudud and Blasphemy ordinances. Here again the chief librarian, Mr. Attar, was very helpful in enabling me to access the material I needed.

I spent the last two weeks in Islamabad focusing on interviewing members of Islamic Ideology Council, faculty at the International Islamic University, representatives of Human Rights organizations, journalists and activists.

The AIPS Islamabad office helped me make initial contact at NDW and helped me schedule interviews. Mr. Nadeem Akbar's various contacts were crucial in my ability to conduct the research in a timely manner. Other staff at the AIPS was also very professional and helpful during my stay in Islamabad. The sense of security and safety and warm hospitality provided by the AIPS center in Islamabad meant that I could focus on my research exclusively without logistical worries.

I moved to Lahore during the last four and a half weeks of my stay in Pakistan. In Lahore I spent considerable amount of time at the Resource Center of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. I was able to gather information on Blasphemy and Hudud ordinances from HRCP resource center. I also interviewed government officials, scholars and activists about the use and abuse of Blasphemy laws. One of the luckiest finds in Lahore was CLASS, Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), a Christian charity that provides legal assistance to those accused of blasphemy. The staff was very generous in sharing documents such as the FIRS and legal decisions regarding blasphemy charges.

Overall I was enormously pleased with my ability to use a little over three months in Pakistan to gather information I need to complete my manuscript. The generous grant and the very capable AIPS staff enabled me to waste no time and get the depth and breadth of information I need for my book project.

Farhat Haq

